

Record

257

File Number

10228

Author: Strully, Jeff Strully, Cindy

Title: Towards inclusiveness

Original source: -

Resource type: Written

Publication Date: 01/01/91

Publisher info: -

**Abstract**

This story tells of one of their daughter's journey towards a life of inclusion. It concentrates on Shawntell's giftedness, whereas professionals and those around her saw, and often still see, only a severe and profound disability. With family support and vision, Shawntell has become part of a circle of friends, college life and the community. The future of Shawntell's journey is still unsure but her family and friends are working towards making her community a more caring and accepting place. **Keyword: Inclusion**

## Toward Inclusiveness

By

Jeffrey L. & Cindy Strully

Our daughter's journey is about to take a new direction as she begins college as an incoming freshmen this fall. Starting college is an exciting time in an eighteen year olds life. This is the beginning of a new set of challenges and experiences. There will be new people to meet and friendships to form. Leaving home is difficult for any young person, it is both scary and exciting at the same time. No matter what happens in the future we are all going to continue to dream about desirable futures and together maybe those dreams will come true.

The journey toward inclusiveness begins when people recognize what is worth working on and what will lead you in the wrong direction. For all of us, getting Shawntell to just be a regular high school student who is

Economics, Science Fiction, and Adult Issues. She has enjoyed being in the drama club, Amnesty International and on the yearbook staff. She is currently involved with the Wild Warrior Women - an exclusive club that only seniors can join!

Shawntell has enjoyed spending weekends in Steamboat Springs or travelling to California, Chicago or Florida with her friends! As long as she is with Cyndi, Joyce, Denise, Brandy and Ruth she is happy. The girls plan weekends where they cook dinner together, pick out some movies to watch and talk late into the night. The girls have come to recognize that Shawntell is the social glue that holds them together. They rely on each other in order to 'make it at Arapahoe High School' and in their daily lives. Shawntell's friends care about her a great deal and she really cares about them!

Of course, there are things that Shawntell has not achieved. She still does not have her own car; she can't find a job that she really likes, and most important she is still working on her prom date. Things are not

order to proceed to the next level. People talked about Shawntell as someone who was 'more than half empty'.

Though helping Shawntell learn new things is important and she, as well as the rest of us, will or should always continue to grow and develop, this path was leading us toward a future that was filled with human services, paid caregivers, segregation, and isolation!

Our dream, and we believe our daughter's dream, was to have a life filled with rich experiences in the middle of things alongside her friends. When we envision the future, we think that there is no single future out there for our daughter, but a series of different futures. The futures for our daughter are so exciting. Living in her own place; living with people she wants to live with; learning things that are important and useful but also fun; doing new things with new people; having close friendships and deep meaningful relationships. **This is what quality of life is all about for our daughter as well as for all of us!**

(especially dad) needs to learn that his 'little girl' is neither little or a girl anymore! Hard lessons for any father to accept.

We really don't know where this journey will finally lead us. We do not have a plan that has measurable objectives. **Life is a mystery.** Yet, there are things that we 'know' Shawntell will always need. Things such as love, friends, caring, opportunities, choices, control and power in her life.

Shawntell doesn't need to be managed by a casemanager nor does she need to be a client in someone's system. Yes, she does need to have support and assistance in order to live the good life, but that does not mean nor should it mean that she needs to be in the human service system. In fact, we have worked hard to keep her out of the 'developmental disabilities human service system'. Whether this will be possible long-term is unknown. Wouldn't it be nice (or right) if Shawntell had real control over the money and the decisions that effect her life rather than being a client who is managed by

to have a decent quality in her life. If we try and do things without the system, we (her family and friends) may not be able to pull this off. The decisions are difficult and the stakes are high.

Overall, things are very exciting in Shawntell's life. For the next several years (until she is done with college), Shawntell is set to learn new things, meet new people, get connected with a new community and explore new paths. An exciting opportunity for any eighteen year old who is ready to spread her wings and start flying

So what have we learned over the last eighteen years of on our journey. We have learned that:

- \* desirable futures are indeed possible
- \* friendships are at the heart of the matter
- \* friendships can and should be nurtured and supported

- \* having people around to think about this stuff who care about Shawntell is critical - you can't do this alone
- \* there are times on the journey that you will need to rethink it, change it or modify it
- \* a journey starts with a dream - then share the dream and start taking the walk together

We asked Shawntell's friends to have the last word so here are their thoughts:

**Brandy** " I have always had friends in school, but I never really did anything with them outside of school and now we are starting to do things together and now my life is richer"

**Ruth** " Shawntell made it through high school. She will do OK at CSU. It won't be easy but we will need to help her"

has been. As long as you keep your eye on the prize and keep dreaming, you can't go wrong! Good luck in your search for inclusiveness for yourself as well as the people who you love!

This article is dedicated to Leslie New without whose assistance our daughter would still be a 'stranger'! Thank you!